United Nations A/71/575–S/2016/907

General Assembly
Security Council

Distr.: General
28 October 2016

Original: English

General Assembly
Seventy-first session
Agenda item 68 (c)
Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights situations and reports of special rapporteurs and representatives

Security Council
Seventy-first year

Letter dated 24 October 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to attach herewith the statement of the Parliament of Ukraine, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, on the illegal deprivation of freedom of Ukrainian journalists Roman Sushchenko and Mykola Semena (see annex).

I would appreciate your kind assistance in having the present letter and its annex distributed as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 68 (c), and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Volodymyr **Yelchenko**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 24 October 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Statement of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on the illegal deprivation of freedom of Ukrainian journalists Roman Sushchenko and Mykola Semena

5 October 2016

On 30 September 2016, under uncertain circumstances, the Russian security service (FSB) detained, in Moscow, a Ukrainian journalist who is a Ukrainian National Information Agency (UKRINFORM) special correspondent in France, Roman Sushchenko, who had arrived in the territory of the Russian Federation for a private visit with his close relatives. The Russian authorities have groundlessly accused him of espionage.

A closed court session was held on 1 October 2016, which resulted in a court decision to arrest the Ukrainian journalist for two months. Ukraine was only notified about the detention of the Ukrainian citizen on 2 October 2016.

Up until the end of day on 3 October 2016, the Russian authorities have not permitted the Ukrainian consular officials to visit their arrested compatriot, which is a grave violation of article 13 of the consular convention between Ukraine and the Russian Federation. Also, a lawyer hasn't been allowed to visit Mr. Sushchenko — another direct violation of his rights as well as the international legal obligations of the Russian Federation.

Taking into account a striking similarity between the detention of Mr. Sushchenko and the detention by the Russian security services of other Ukrainian citizens, who are recognized by the international community as political prisoners of the Kremlin, and the completely farfetched nature of this case, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine expresses its deep concern about the illegal detention and further fate of the Ukrainian journalist.

We have to highlight that Mr. Sushchenko is not the only Ukrainian journalist who faces a fabricated case. In particular, there is another citizen of Ukraine, Mykola Semena, a journalist who also faces false accusations in a fabricated case and who is under a court trial today in the temporarily occupied Crimea. Despite the protests of the Ukrainian authorities and journalist organizations, Mr. Semena is not allowed to leave the occupied Crimea for medical treatment.

Performing his professional duties and defending his civil position, this journalist wrote an article entitled "The blockade is the first step to the liberation of Crimea", posted on the information website "Crimea. Realities" — a Radio Svoboda project — while he was in the mainland of Ukraine in September 2015.

On 19 April 2016, the Russian security service (FSB) searched Mr. Semena's residence in the temporarily occupied Crimea and later initiated a criminal investigation accusing him of separatism for his publications as a journalist.

Despite Mr. Semena's health condition, he was denied entry to the mainland of Ukraine for medical treatment, which can clearly be considered as torture. In October 2016, criminal proceedings against him will continue based on the trumped-up charges.

These and other cases against citizens of Ukraine, who are illegally held in Russia and in the territory of Ukraine which is under the Russian occupation, are a clear demonstration of continuing human rights violations by the Russian Federation on a massive scale, using the methods of forcible seizure in its territory or abduction of hostages from the territory of Ukraine with subsequent initiation of preposterous accusations against them. The Russian Federation actively applies psychological pressure and physical torture to the detained Ukrainians.

We firmly believe that the mentioned cases of persecution of Ukrainian citizens are directly linked to their journalistic activities.

Through such actions the representatives of the Russian Federation are trying to intimidate journalists, attempting to take hostage those for whom the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular freedom of speech and expression, is essential and lies within the core of their work. This wrongful goal must not be achieved and such actions deserve condemnation.

We urgently call on you to consolidate efforts to release the Ukrainian journalists held by the Russian Federation, which gravely violates human rights, and to facilitate the immediate access of consular officials of Ukraine and a lawyer to the detained journalist, Roman Sushchenko. It is only through the joint actions of Ukraine and the international community that we can stop the gross violations of human rights, which, unfortunately, have now become a regular practice in the Russian Federation.